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COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH
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LETTER DATED 9 APRIL 1998 FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ON THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH THE HOST COUNTRY

I have the honour to enclose herewith the response of the United States Mission to a note verbale dated 9 March 1998 received by this Mission from the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations (A/AC.154/315, annex) regarding an incident involving the Permanent Representative of Cuba, a Belgian security firm and representatives of Delta Airlines at the Brussels airport on 27 February 1998 (see annex I).

As can be seen from the United States Mission's reply as reflected in a circular note verbale sent on 21 March 1998 to all permanent and observer missions (see annex II), it is suggested that all diplomatic officers accredited to the United Nations in New York make their diplomatic status clear to security agents and airline officials when boarding international flights destined to United States airports from outside the United States. A similar circular note verbale was sent to all permanent and observer missions on 28 August 1996 recommending that that procedure be followed when boarding international flights originating at United States airports (see annex III).

I request that you circulate the text of the present letter and its annexes as an official document of the Committee on Relations with the Host Country.

(Signed) Betty KING
Ambassador

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ANNEX I

Note verbale dated 21 March 1998 from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations

The United States Mission to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations, and with reference to the latter's note No. 132 of 9 March 1998 regarding an incident which occurred at the Brussels airport on 27 February 1998, invites the attention of the Permanent Mission to the attached circular note which was sent today to all permanent missions and permanent observers (see annex II).

The Chief of Protocol for Delta Airlines has asked the United States Mission to convey to the Permanent Mission his concern over the unpleasant experience of the Permanent Representative as a result of a security check. The United States Mission believes the procedures set forth in the attached circular note should eliminate a similar occurrence in the future.

ANNEX II

Circular note verbale dated 21 March 1998 from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to all permanent and observer missions at Headquarters

The United States Mission to the United Nations presents its compliments to the permanent missions and permanent observers to the United Nations and has the honour to inform the members of the missions of airport security procedures in effect for United States airports as well as for United States-flag carriers departing from foreign airports.

Airline and government officials responsible for protecting the safety of all air travellers, including diplomats accredited to the United Nations, have implemented, over time, certain security procedures at United States airports in response to potential threats and actions by terrorist groups. Many United States-flag air carriers have subsequently implemented certain of the security procedures for flights departing from foreign airports as well.

In its circular note verbale HC-31-96 of 28 August 1996 (see annex III), the United States Mission informed members of the United Nations diplomatic community that they should carry their official United States Department of State identification cards with them at all times when travelling from United States airports, thereby assisting airline and government officials with their identification as bona fide diplomats or members of missions. The United States Mission recommends that members of the missions and their families also carry their United States Department of State identification cards with them when travelling on United States-flag air carriers departing from foreign airports.

Diplomats and family members should expect that their baggage and their persons will be subjected to normal security checks, e.g., bags will be X-rayed and individuals will be expected to walk through metal detectors.

Diplomats have been subject to pre-boarding security inspections since the 1970s when a wave of hijackings led the United States and other countries to require pre-boarding screening. The practice is widespread and has been accepted by the international community. Moreover, an individual airline may decline to board diplomats or family members who decline to voluntarily permit the search of their personal baggage or person.

While it is regrettable that conditions are such that these procedures are necessary, diplomats and family members should bear in mind that, although inconvenient at times, the procedures are for their security and safety.

ANNEX III

Circular note verbale dated 28 August 1996 from the United States Mission to the United Nations addressed to all permanent and observer missions at Headquarters

The United States Mission to the United Nations presents its compliments to the permanent missions and offices of the permanent observers to the United Nations and has the honour to inform those members of airport security procedures now in effect at United States airports.

The procedures are designed to protect the security and safety of all persons who travel, including diplomats accredited to the United Nations in New York and their families. Recent threats and actions by terrorist groups require heightened efforts by airline and government officials responsible for protecting the safety of air travellers.

Diplomats accredited to the United Nations and their family members who plan to travel from United States airports should carry their official United States Department of State identification cards with them for identification purposes at the airport. Diplomats and family members should expect that their baggage and their person will be subjected to normal security checks, for example, bags will be X-rayed and individuals will be expected to walk through the metal detectors. Moreover, an airline may decline to board a diplomat or family member who declines to voluntarily permit the search of their personal baggage or person.

The United States Mission to the United Nations regrets that conditions are such that these procedures are necessary for the safety of air travellers. The United States Mission appreciates the cooperation of members of the United Nations diplomatic community in this regard and avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the permanent missions and the observer offices to the United Nations the assurances of its highest consideration.